Australian Bureau of Statistics

4402.0 - Child Care, Australia, Jun 2002

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 09/05/2003

MEDIA RELEASE

May 9, 2003 Embargoed: 11:30 AM (AEST) 45/2003

National Families Week and Mother's Day 2003: ABS facts and figures

To assist your coverage of National Families Week (11 - 17 May) and Mother's Day 2003, the following selection of information has been drawn from a variety of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sources.

Family structure and composition are changing

The number of families in Australia, recorded in the 2001 Census has increased to 4.9 million. This represents an increase of 6.0% since 1996.

There were 2.3 million couple families with children in 2001. This comprised 47% of all families, which is down from 50% in 1996. There were corresponding increases in the proportion of couple families without children (36%), up from 34% in 1996 and lone parent families (15.4%), up from 14.5% in 1996.

Less people are choosing to marry and more are divorcing

In 2001, Australia recorded the lowest number of registered marriages (103,100) and one of the highest annual number of divorces (55,300). In comparison, the number of de facto marriages increased from a total of 763,700 in 1996, to 989,200 in 2001.

In 2001, 51% of divorces involved children under the age of 18 years. Following divorce or separation, one or both parents may remarry, and bring the children of the relationship into a step family. A blended family is formed when the parents in a step family then have a child together. The 1997 Family Characteristics Survey revealed some 4% of all families with children younger than 18, were step-families and 3% were blended families.

People are having fewer children and starting child bearing later

The number of births registered in 2001 declined by 3,200 or 1% compared to 2000. Just over half (51%) of all births registered in 2001 were male babies.

The upward trend in median ages of parents continued in 2001, to 30.0 years for mothers and 32.3 years for fathers. This reflects the tendency for couples to have children later in life.

Combining work and family

In March 2003, the labour force participation rate of parents with children under 15 years in couple families (79%) was higher than lone parent families (56%). Conversely, the unemployment rate of parents in families with children under 15 years, is higher in lone parent families (17%) than in couple families (4%).

In 1999, employed mothers of children aged under 12 years, make more use of work arrangements (68%) than employed fathers (27%). The most frequently used arrangements by employed mothers were flexible working hours (37%) and permanent part-time work (34%).

Media Note: Child Care, Australia June 2002 (cat. no. 4402.0) will be released on May 16, 2003. This publication contains statistics about the use of, and demand for, child care in June 2002.

For information about National Families Week (11 - 18 May 2003), view web site http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/fweek.

This page last updated 8 December 2006

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